# critical digest

505 FIFTH AVENUE. N. Y. 17. N. Y.
MU 2-0328 T. M. KRAUS

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## New York Theatre Diary

Show Boat- City Center 5/5/54. First of 3 limited run productions of NYC Light Opera Company. Directed by Wm. Hammerstein with Robert Rounseville, Burl Ives,and Jo Sullivan...Here Come the Clowns- Cherry Lane 5/5/54. Theater Album presents a revival of Philip Barry's play...Building Blocks- 83 E 4th 5/6/54 . Two by Four Productions present a new play by Eugene Feist as their first production...The Sea Gull- Phoenix 5/11/54. Fourth and final production of season. Norris Houghton directing with Montgomery Clift, Judith Evelyn, and Kevin McCarthy...The Pajama Game- St. James 5/13/54. Brisson-Griffith-Prince present new musical comedy based on Richard Bissell's "7½ Cents". With John Raitt, Janis Paige, and Eddie Foy, Jr.

## Current Theatre Reviews

The Girl on Via Flaminia-48th St. One unfavorable notice has been filed on the transplanted Circle in the Square production, while two more "pro" notices are added to its critical file. Bentley, New Republic, listed it as monotonous, but blamed the author not the actors. Critic noted that Betty Miller has been unfairly condemned in a play which has several vastly inferior and amateur performances. The playwright, he summed up, presented a situation which he didn't develop, not a drama. Kerr, Herald Tribune, and McClain, Journal American, both praised the production for losing none of its impact in its switch from Greenwich Village to Broadway. Herald Tribune reviewer suggests that director might have gained a certain convential authority by giving his group scenes a bolder outline. But even so it remains,Kerr comments, one of the most accurate ieces of writing and one of the most moving experiences of the season.

## Barter Theatre Auditions in Alley

This year's Barter Theatre Auditions were held in the alley of the Martin Beck Theatre. David Wayne, winner of the annual award of the Virginia theatre, judged short readings by 137 vying for two 13 week summer contracts at the Barter Theatre. The unusual setting was the result of the refusal of the Stagehand's Union to allow the auditions to take place on the stage of the Martin Beck. Solly Pernick, business manager of the stagehand's group, threatened reprisals against the theatre if Robert Porterfield,producer of Barter Theatre,used the stage. This traces back to a dispute between Porterfield and Pernick. Former refuses to hire union stagehands, arguing that stagehands should not be paid more than actors.

## Off Broadway Ground Rules

The success of two Off Broadway projects, John Heldabrand's production of dramatic readings at the New School on Sundays, and the Broadway Chapel Players' production of Fry's The Boy With A Cart, should be studied by would be producers,urges Rice,Post. Their success, beyond the fact that they are exceptionally well done,are due to four reasons. They have a point of view, there is an application of imagination, the creative stamp of the producers is evidenced, and the plays are just right for their locations.

## Off Broadway

Praise for the NYC departments involved in the final approval of a theatre license was extended by Macdonald Eaton, co-producer of "Two by Four" productions opening this week at 83 E 4 with Building Blocks. Though a previous opening date had to be postponed it is hoped that the requested changes will be approved by the Fire, Housing, Water Supply and Health Departments in time for the opening.

World of Sholom Aleichem has extended its run at the Barbizon Plaza until May 23. This is definitely the last extension. The production will go on tour in the fall...Les Pines' The Fisherman is being presented at the Lenox Studio Workshop, 79 W 125 week-ends...Olive Dunbar will play the role of narrator in Fry's The Boy With A Cart at the May 9 performance at Broadway Tabernacle. Florida Friebus will resume her role May 16. ...Jack Gilford, Rosetta LeNoire, Muriel Rahn and Jimmy Symington are among the entertainers of the Equity Library Theatre Spring Cocktail Revue May 9 at the Hotel Piccadilly...3 Paul Green one act plays may be presented at Theatre de Lys in July under the title Salvation on a String. C W Christenberry, Jr and David B Graham are the producers.

Rope, William Gass' revival of the Patrick Hamilton thriller which has had 3 openings and one "closing", received split notices from a pair of critics who attended the production at the Open Door Cabaret Theatre, 55 W 3. Sheaffer, Eagle, listed it as definitely worth seeing, a slick, shrewd, tightly constructed piece. But Rice, Post, found it merely zealously willing. Drama editor feared it was a suspense play without much suspense.

## Vaudeville

New Radio City show features Sahomi Tachibana, Irene Antal, Eric Hutson, Maria DiGerlando in "Cherry Blossom Time" revue. ...Current Palace stage-show is headlined by Valaida Snow. Also Milt Douglas, Pauline Thorn, Vic Spaddy, Lott Anders.

## Theatre Record Comments

"Showbiz" LP Album was highly recommended by Burr, Playbill. Not only the recorded voices of remembered performances make it delightful, but also the vast panorama of remembered voices that those voices recall. For those who never heard the famed voices before, it's a tremendously valuable object lesson on how to sell material to an audience and how to make the absolute most of great talents.

"Gershwin Rarities" and "Songs by Rodgers and Hart" ( Walden) present fine vocal versions of seldom heard songs by the famous authors, rates Zinsser, Herald Tribune. "George Byron Singing Kern Rarities" (Atlantic) was also approved for the same reason.

"Harold Rome Singing His Own Songs" ( Heritage) provides an entertaining solo performance, okays Zinsser, Herald Tribune.

## "CD" Film Ratings

"CD" Playgoers Guide Charts will feature critical ratings of first run Broadway motion pictures weekly.

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Tune WNYC Around New York Thur 8 AM for "Off Broadway Round Up" by "CD." Day after opening tune WNBC Ben Grauer 7 30 AM for "CD" quotes of reviews.

## Green Room Department

FINEST CRITIC...If anyone insisted that Eric Keown of London's "Punch" is the finest critic now assailing the English speaking stage, Burr, Playbill, would not argue. In the microscopic area allowed he manages to pack more sense and acumen in evaluating plays and players than many a ponderous pundit in more self consciously intellectual periodicals, Burr believes. Keown says the things you would have liked to say your self if you only had been equipped with equal wit and pungency.

TALENT TIPS...Sally Knapp, in the Gilbert & Sullivan company at the President, is the most attractive and talented ingenue to emerge in any form of musical comedy in several years, raves Watts, Post...Maybe Rodgers & Hammerstein will get around to writing a musical for Ed Wynn, hopes Coleman, Mirror.

GOOD FAILURES...A remarkable feature of the 1953-54 season has been the high average of plays that brought out the red ink on the ledgers, sums up Dash, Women's Wear. With theatre patrons in an escapist mood, the plays that failed frequently contained more pithy, significant or provocative ideas than those that made the grade in the commercial theatre markets. The "10 Best Failures" he picked include: The Strong Are Lonely, Ladies of the Corridor, Trip to Bountiful, Take a Giant Step, In the Summer House, The Frogs of Spring, The Prescott Proposals, Mademoiselle Colombe, The Burning Glass, The Winner,

CRITICAL THOUGHTS...Since Variety listed Watts, Post, review of By the Beautiful Sea as "indecisive, the critic wonders if he should use a "playmeter" just for the trade paper...The Fifth Season will probably exceed the total performance mark of Peg O' My Heart, predicts Morehouse, WT&S...Turning thumbs down on the original production of Here Comes the Clowns, being revived at the Cherry Lane, disturbed Coleman, Mirror, for a long time.

STAY DOWNTOWN...The Golden Apple staff and cast should stay right where they are at the Phoenix, comments Levin, Press, to help liberate the theatre from Broadway. It would teach the theatre crowd a lesson and make Manhatten come to the downtown area.

TOPICAL THEATRE...Though season has hardly been troubled by either startling viewpoints or epoch-making comments on contemporary history, no one can deny it hasn't been topical in subject matter covered, sums up Watts, Post...Gould, Times, doubts if the best way TV can aid the theatre is by calling all angels as is attempted in the new ABC TV "Angel Auditions." The idea of paying for a show, fears the TV editor, is apt to strike a TV viewer as un-American.

## Pros & Cons by TMK

Probably in no other business is failure admitted as quickly as in the theatre. If a given play fails to register a fair number of "pro" reviews and/or a huge advance, most concerned with the production are ready to give up by Saturday. Economics, of course, has a lot to do with it. Off Broadway can teach Broadway producers that ingenuity and fortitude are just as important as cash.

Equity Library Theatre's production of Thunder on the Left was another fine job all concerned. Week in and week out ELT presents revivals of seldom seen plays. Except for miscasting due to age brackets their productions are always worthwhile. Many actors and directors have won jobs for their ELT work. Before the award season closes, some one should give an award or two to ELT and its staff.

An official answer to "When is the view from a theatre seat obstructed?" is being sought by NY Legitimate theatre owners. [illegible] May 1 owners are under orders of NYC Commissioner of Licenses McCaffrey to display seating plans in lobbies and to mark tickets which have "obstructed views" of stage. The owners are wondering if tickets for seats where patrons could only see part of a particular set would have to be so labeled. A group from the League of NY Theatres hopes to meet with the city officer this week.

Plays

Shows that closed include The Immoralist, and The Magic and the Loss...Sabrina Fair moves from National to Royale May 17...Princess Ida has been dropped from the Gilbert & Sullivan company schedule at the President, and Mikado will be present- the week of May 11...Announced plans for next fall include a reading of Edgar Lee Masters' Domesday Book due Aug 23,the 85th anniversary of the poet's birth, and The Gaep, a first play by Vincent Longhi presented by John Forsythe.

People

Estimated NYC attendance at 30 shows, on and off Broadway, by "CD" is 185,000 for the current week...Marilyn Clark and Irene Moore subbed for Vanessa Brown during her vacation from Seven Year Itch. Sally Forrest will take over her role when she leaves cast at end of month...Leora Dana will replace Margaret Sullavan in Sabrina Fair at the end of May...Actors Equity and League of NY Theatres have begun talks prior to new contract discussions...Ward Morehouse, World Telegram-Sun, is on a round the world trip...Joe Laurie,Jr, died at age of 62.

Award Dept

Vilma Kurer, The Winner, and David Lewis, King of Hearts, have won the Clarence Derwent Awards for the best supporting performances by a non featured actress and actor...Alfred Lunt has received the Award of Knight First Class of the Order of the Finnish White Rose from the Minister of Finalnd to US for his role in There ShallBe No Night.

Other Broadways

Christopher Fry's new play, The Dark is Light Enough, opened in London to rave notices for Dame Edith Evans and Fry's prose-poetry, but mixed views on the play... France's Comedie Francaise troupe was well received in its recent visits to Moscow and Leningrad...Rockerfeller Foundation has granted $40,000 to Canada's Stratford Shakespeare Festival. To secure the grant the festival must raise $80,000 on its own by June 30, 1954.

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